

NOTES ON THE AMANI SUNBIRD *ANTHREPTES PALLIDIGASTER* INCLUDING A DESCRIPTION OF THE NEST AND EGGS Stuart & Hutton (1977) have given the most complete account of the habits of the Amani Sunbird, especially at Amani in northeastern Tanzania where it occurs in evergreen forest (mainly secondary) up to 900 m a.s.l. It is a very distinctive East African endemic which is known from only the *Brachystegia* woodlands of Soko Forest in coastal Kenya and the East Usambaras in the vicinity of Amani. Suitable habitat occupies only 70 km² of the 360 km² Soko Forest (Britton 1975) so that the total range of this monotypic species is probably as little as 150 km². Flocking at flowering trees, described by Moreau & Moreau (1937), and quoted as typical behaviour by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) and Hall & Moreau (1970), is evidently unusual; it is mainly seen singly or in pairs in the canopy, sometimes in mixed parties (Turner 1977, Stuart & Hutton 1977). Other information given by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) includes its diet of small spiders and insect larvae and its 'minute jingling sibilant song, hardly audible'. A breeding record at Soko Forest in May is included in their addenda (p.1103) without details, and correspondence with W.P. Langridge, I.S.C. Parker and J.G. Williams has failed to reveal the source of this record. The nest and eggs remained undescribed.

OBSERVATIONS

Regular visits to diverse areas of *Brachystegia* woodland in Soko Forest since 1973 have shown that this is one of the characteristic species of this habitat, with an estimated 2900-4700 pairs (1 pair per 1.5 to 2.4 ha), derived from 24 line transects of 1 to 3 km at four sites using the methods of Emlen (1977). This restless species usually forages at 5 - 15 m, often hanging upside down in the manner of a tit *Parus* sp. Fewer than 20% of observations involve mixed bird parties, especially Collared Sunbird *A. collaris*, monarchine flycatchers and Black-headed Apalis *Apalis melanocephala*, rather than larger species. Its loud *seer-seer* call note, followed by a twittering flight note as it flies from one tree top to another, enables it to be readily located. The jingling song is barely audible and seldom heard; Keith & Gunn (1971) include an excellent recording of this 'typical sunbird song, bubbly and bustling'.

Nests with incubating females were found in *Brachystegia spiciformis* trees at 14 m and 7 m above the ground on 10 September and 15 October 1977. Each nest was about 40 cm long, including its shroud of *Usnea* lichen, though the nests themselves were like typical nests of *Anthreptes collaris*, and made from very fine grass-like fibres and small amounts of plant down, with a thin 'shell' and sizable porch made from *Usnea*. An abundance of hanging *Usnea* is a feature of these trees so that nests are not easily seen. A similar nest was found by J.D. Gerhart (*in litt.*) in a thin *B. spiciformis* tree on 26 March 1978; both male and female were entering the nest, though it could not be established whether they were feeding young or simply working on the nest.

A clutch of three slightly incubated eggs was collected for the National Museum on 15 October 1977. They measure 16.0 × 11.1, 15.7 × 11.0 and 15.4 × 10.9 mm, and all weighed 1.0 g (to the nearest 0.1 g). They are beige, heavily marked with brown, especially at the rounded end. There are numerous loosely scattered very dark brown (virtually black) spots, and some chocolate brown markings up to 2 mm long, but no streaks.

On 30 June 1977 M. Robbins and D.A. Zimmerman (*in litt.*) watched a male and female feeding three or more flying young, and we watched a

female feeding a young bird on 28 May 1978. In East Africa it is extremely unusual for sunbirds to lay as many as three eggs, though present evidence suggests that this might be normal for this species.

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NOTICES

EAST AFRICAN BIRD REPORT 1978

The East African Bird Report 1977 has recently been published (*Scopus* 1(5): 113-154), rather later than had originally been intended and containing fewer records than had been anticipated. The shortage of records was due in part, no doubt, to observers being unsure of the type of information required. Now that one report is published, the selection of records for submission for future reports should be made more easily.

It will be a great help to the compilers if records for 1978 are sent in as early in 1979 as possible - which will allow the report to be published more quickly. A fairly comprehensive outline of the requirements was given in *Scopus* 1: 111-112, to which readers are referred. In that outline mention was made of a forthcoming 'checklist' of East African birds being produced by members of the Ornithological Sub-committee; this work, in an advanced stage of preparation, will be called *The Birds of East Africa* and will be published during 1979: it will serve as a base for evaluating future records but, in the meantime, please send your 1978 records (and any unpublished records for earlier years) to the two compilers:

For Palaearctic species: B.S. Meadows, Box 30521, Nairobi.

For all other species: D.A. Turner, Box 48019, Nairobi.